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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000971

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S MELINDA TABLER-STONE
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT HITS BACK AT IMPEACHMENT SUPPORTERS

1. (SBU) A number of opposition politicians have been arrested over the past two weeks in retaliation for their support of the effort to impeach President Mutharika. While the arrests are apparently for legitimate crimes, the President has openly admitted that the arrests a "tit for tat" response to the oppositions attempts to impeach him.

2. (U) Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) MP Lucius Banda, who had presented the bill putting in place impeachment procedures, was arrested last week for forging a high school diploma in order to qualify for his parliamentary seat. Maxwell Milanzi, the UDF MP who put forward the motion to indict the president, was also arrested for covering up a previous arrest that should have made him ineligible for Parliament. Finally, UDF Spokesman, and former Minister of Education, Sam Mpasu was arrested on corruption charges after returning from a trip to Scotland last week. All three were arrested, and then released on bail the same day.

3. (SBU) Comment: The arrests are clearly politically motivated, as the President himself all but admitted in press statements on Monday, November 7. However, the charges against Banda and Milanzi seem to be legitimate, and both should be fairly easy to prove. The Mpasu case is a different story, and should be much more difficult to pursue. Though the arrests have been specifically targeted against the UDF's point men on impeachment, they have caused both opposition parties to take notice, and opposition MPs are becoming increasingly nervous that more arrests could follow. It appears unlikely to us that this campaign will target members from the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), which cooperated passively in the impeachment move. The MCP does not hold the personal or political enmity toward Mutharika that UDF does, and Mutharika continues to woo both the party leadership and individual members. (End Comment).
GILMOUR